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POLITICS IN ENGLAND.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

"NEVER was a political situation more piquant and paradoxical than that which in some respects confronts us to-day." So, early in April, wrote one of the keenest and most catholic minds engaged in the practice of English journalism; and the correctness of his diagnosis was confirmed a few days later by Mr. Morley himself when he declared that "so far as he knew, there was never a more interesting moment in our modern Parliamentary and party history." Things, indeed, are moving in the world of politics with an almost un-English celerity. The long transitional period which followed the irruption of Home Rule seems to be nearing its end. Organic forces are stirring in a way that, after so many years of "parties in flux," would appear to herald the moment of precipitation. We live in the meantime in an atmosphere of surprises, uncertainties and speculation; the public mind is about equally amazed and confused; and politicians are cultivating the featureless and fantastic caution of men who are not quite sure of their ground and decidedly prefer to wait on events. "I advise my young men," said Walpole, "on no account to use the word 'never.'" Even the youngest of our young men of to-day needs no such reminder. The one quality all Englishmen are at this moment heartily agreed on avoiding is explicitness, either of statement or prophecy. A becoming hesitancy, with nothing more definite in it than a half-hearted surmise or a hint of doubtful possibilities, is simply forced upon the commentator by the complexities of his subject. At the most he can but hope to set forth, with some approach to accuracy, wherein those complexities consist.

To Americans, at any rate, the matter should present few difficulties. The politics of the two countries have for years past been

running on essentially parallel lines; and, roughly speaking, any one who understands the American situation understands the English also; any one who can solve the one can solve the other. Home Rule and Free Silver have played an almost identical part in the recent history of the two peoples. Neither measure, to begin with, was a natural outcome of the doctrines of the party that adopted it. In each case it was grafted on the party programme forcibly and at word of command. When Mr. Bryan stampeded the Chicago Convention of 1896 into adopting Free Silver he merely repeated the tactics which Mr. Gladstone had employed ten years earlier to coerce his party into accepting Home Rule. Neither could appeal for justification to the past faith and principles of American Democracy or English Liberalism. The new policy cut avowedly across the continuity of doctrinal development. In each case it staggered and scandalized the average elector; in each case, too, it led immediately to a party split. The Liberal Unionists who under Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain broke away from Mr. Gladstone were in precisely the same position, ethically and politically, as the Gold Democrats who bolted the Chicago platform. In England as in America the new doctrines were absolutely repudiated by the country, and for a while the English Unionists, like the American Gold Democrats, became a virtually national party—so conspicuously representative of the sound conservatism of the country that no one but a few fanatics wished to see them turned out.

The parallel may even be carried further. The Spanish war and the Boer war raised fresh issues before the two nations, and on each side of the Atlantic the Democrats and the Liberals proceeded at once to show that their foreign was no better than their domestic policy. Mr. Bryan threw down his gauge to American Imperialism; the challenge was accepted, with results that were hailed as warmly in England as in the United States. The English Liberals, or at least the majority of them, denounced the Boer war and tried to get the country to side with them, and the country met their advances by piling up a majority of 130 for their opponents. Of course, I do not trace back the present helplessness of the English Liberals solely to Home Rule and their reputation for Little Englandism. It is of far older standing than that and due to more varied causes. One of these is their success and energy in the past. They have reformed so much that there

is hardly anything left worth reforming. Along the lines laid down by Grey, Russell, Bright and Gladstone, their work is well-nigh over. The two institutions that lend themselves naturally to Liberal antipathies, the House of Lords and the Established Church, are at present quite beyond reach of successful attack; and for the rest, all the pulling down and all the constitutional reform that can be done has been done. No one, for instance, wants the franchise to be enlarged; no one wants the old and tried institutions of the country to be tinkered at any more. The Liberalism of the old school, the Liberalism that was always attacking here, abolishing there, and levelling everywhere, has completely exhausted its mandate. After Mr. Gladstone's cyclonic career of destruction, there is the inevitable reaction in favor of letting things alone. It is the general sense of the nation that what is now required is building up, positive, constructive reform; and to this change Liberalism, always stronger in attack than defence, has not yet been able to accommodate itself.

Again the Liberals suffer from that curious interchange of policies which has all but wiped out the old and well-marked differences between Whig and Tory. Indeed, political names are beginning to be as unrepresentative of political things in England as they long have been in Italy. The Conservatives caught the Liberals bathing in the Irish sea and marched off with thier clothes. Nothing has been more remarkable in recent English history than the growth of the Tory party in the confidence of the working-men—a growth, by the by, which Disraeli, with alien perspicacity, foresaw. It was Lord Randolph Churchill who first lifted the Tory party out of the rut and gave it the democratic impulse toward social reform. Mr. Chamberlain has carried on Lord Randolph's work and forced upon the Tories some of the most radical measures to be found in the English statute-book. That is doubly hard on the Liberals. Not only are they without a programme, but they see what ought to be their programme annexed by their opponents. And, besides all this, one must bear in mind, when seeking the reason for the completeness of the Liberal collapse, that the mechanical barriers which are so serviceable in America hardly exist in England. How far faith is essential to the cohesion and effectiveness of a political party it would be hard to decide. The great American parties, for instance, represent merely antagonistic opinions, if they even do

that. Certainly, an onlooker cannot discover that they stand for anything stronger. Vital beliefs, principles, anything in the nature of a political religion, are as hard to come across among the Republicans as among the Democrats. What is it, then, that has prevented the American parties from falling to pieces? Simply the strength of party ties, and particularly the strength of party organization. But in England no organization worthy the name exists. There is only the shadow of a "machine" and there is absolutely no controlling authority, like the American Conventions, that has the power to choose candidates and to formulate the programme on which they are to run. In politics, as in every other branch of life in England, individualism is fiercely cultivated. Americans have found in the rigidity of party organization and in the willingness of the minority to acquiesce in the decisions of the majority, the main cement that holds their parties together. Englishmen have succeeded for two hundred years in manufacturing that cement out of faith, tradition and the ascendency of individual leaders. But now that the Liberals have parted with all that made them a strong, consistent and cohesive party in the past, now that they happen to be destitute of commanding leaders and are torn, in consequence, by personal rivalries, they find that, lacking organization, nothing stands between them and chaos. That explains why the demoralization has gone further among the English Liberals than among the American Democrats. Practically, there is nothing to prevent an English party, once on the slide, from landing in the ravine.

But, to leave the more general and return to the specific and immediate conditions, one finds that the situation created by Home Rule and the Gladstonian "bias of anti-nationalism," is precisely that in which the American Democrats, thanks to Free Silver and Anti-Imperialism, are now floundering. In each party there are two sections. There are Liberals, like Lord Rosebery, Mr. Haldane, Mr. Asquith, and Sir Edward Grey, who are thoroughgoing Imperialists, who have renounced the Gladstonian form of Home Rule, and who are endeavoring to steer the party back to its old anchorage. In the same way, the clearest-headed and most conservative Democrats in the United States are organizing a movement that, if it succeeds, can only mean the repudiation of Mr. Bryan and Free Silver. On the other hand, the bulk of the official Liberals, like the bulk of the official Democrats, still per-

versely cling to the policy that has already led them twice to disaster and wholly estranged from them the common sense of their countrymen. I asked Mr. Herbert Paul for an authoritative exposition of their views. Mr. Paul possesses what is probably the most pungent pen that has ever been devoted to the service of English journalism. He sat for some years in the House of Commons as one of the members for Edinburgh, he is a scholar of singular acuteness, and, what is more to my present purpose, a foremost champion of the stern and unbending Gladstonianism which the nation is supposed to have outgrown. What Mr. Paul was good enough to say to me may, I think, be taken as thoroughly representative of the official Liberalism against which Lord Rosebery is fighting. He said:

"I warn you, you have come to a pessimist. Some might call me unwarrantably pessimistic, but I own that to me the position of the Liberal party seems desperate, even hopeless. You say, for instance, that the war is over, that the Government can no longer lay claim to the 'patriotism' of the country, that from now onwards it will be judged on its domestic record. So far as that is true, of course it helps the Liberals. But it is not the whole truth. The war is over, but the bitterness and the dissensions it roused in the Liberal party are by no means past. I speak of things within my own personal knowledge when I say that a real reunion seems as far off as ever. The Liberal party has not recovered, I hardly see how it can recover, from its fatal hesitancy at the beginning of the South-African crisis. In my opinion, it both could and should have prevented the war. On that point, as on most others, I am absolutely with Mr. Morley. His course from the first was clear and consistent, and, had it been followed, would have saved the Liberal party from disaster. And then, besides the split caused by the war, there is the reappearance of Lord Rosebery and his bid for the leadership. For that is what it undoubtedly is. I hardly think he will succeed. I admit his extreme cleverness and the curious fascination he has for the people—a fascination that no mistakes seem wholly able to destroy. But one wants something more than this in a leader. One wants, for instance, definiteness, and Lord Rosebery is not definite. I doubt whether even those who are most attracted by him could say what his policy is. He rarely takes up any position which he does not afterwards abandon. Not long ago he made a speech in which he appeared to support the Nonconformists in their refusal to pay the new Education rate. That, at least, was how I and most people read it. But a few days later Lord Rosebery explained it all away, and declared that he meant nothing of the kind. The last question one should have to ask of a political leader is, 'What do you mean'? But that is the first question one is forced to ask of Lord Rosebery. What the Liberals need is

a 'last-ditch' man, and Lord Rosebery, so far from being that, is often not even a party man; and, in spite of his able lieutenants and the zeal of his electioneering supporters, the Liberal party will remain substantially a Gladstonian and not a Rosebery party. At bottom, and apart from personal differences, what really divides the Liberal party is still the Irish question. 'Imperialism' is too intangible an issue. Nobody, least of all Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, wishes to decrease the Empire. Lord Rosebery says he does not wish to increase it. There is not room for much real difference between these two positions. But in the matter of Ireland the break is, or appears to be, complete. Lord Rosebery declares he will not take office in a Cabinet that can only maintain itself by the help of Irish votes and by yielding to Irish demands. Also, he has renounced Home Rule and broken off the alliance between the Liberals and the Nationalists. Mr. Asquith, Mr. Haldane, Sir Edward Grey, and Sir Henry Fowler have supported him in doing so. Well, I will assume, though others do not, that this is their fixed intention. What follows? Simply that it is an impossible one to carry out. I can imagine a Rosebery Cabinet and I can imagine a Campbell-Bannerman Cabinet, but I cannot, as things are, imagine any Liberal Cabinet that is able to dispense with the Irish vote. Sir Henry still stands by Home Rule, but whether it will be possible for the Liberals to introduce a third Home Rule Bill and pass it, is another question. My own opinion is that, while Home Rule is bound to come, it is far more likely to be through the Conservatives than the Liberals. And, besides all the weakness that results from this rivalry of personalities and policies, you have the solid fact that the present Government has a majority of 130. A majority of 130 takes a lot of wiping out. For the Liberals in their present condition it is an impossible task. The next General Election, no doubt, will see it reduced, but to hope for a Liberal victory is ridiculous. It is true that the Government have lost far more than they have gained by the Education Bill and the Corn Tax. The former especially has had one great result—it has revived the power of political Nonconformity. It has imposed upon Liberals the clear duty of doing all they can to bring the Education Authorities under popular control; and it has also strengthened their general position. With all this, I still cannot see the smallest prospect of the Liberals being in office again. Personally, I think they ought to concentrate on whatever remains uncarried of the Newcastle Programme. That would be my prescription, if I had to make one, though I know perfectly well it would not unite all sections. Very possibly the upshot may be the gradual formation of a new Liberal party with a strong socialistic bent. Meanwhile, as I said, the situation seems to me hopeless."

As against Mr. Paul's views and his advice to "concentrate on whatever remains uncarried of the Newcastle Programme"—which is precisely the same as advising the American Democrats to concentrate once more on the Chicago platform of 1896—may

be set the opinions with which Mr. Haldane favored me. Mr. Haldane is a Privy Councillor, in the first flight of English lawyers, an intimate ally of Lord Rosebery, and perhaps the ripest and most comprehensive intellect that is enlisted in the Liberal cause. I transcribe his words:

"Our position, the Rosebery position, is briefly this: We find that England is Liberal, but against the Liberals, and we have first of all to discover how such a paradox has come about. In our opinion, it is due to the fact that the Liberals have not marched with the times. They have clung to the old shibboleths and they have overburdened themselves with huge, hasty, and impractical programmes. You will find the best instance of this in Ireland. Everybody who has any claim to be called a practical politician knows that Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1893 are dead and buried, and cannot be resurrected. Well, we—that is to say, Lord Rosebery's followers—not only admit that, but proceed to act upon it. We take stock of the facts as they are to-day; we examine Irish conditions, not from the point of view of 1886 and 1893, but from the point of view of the present moment. And what do we find? First of all, we find what I may call a new Centre Party growing up, a party at once moderate and practical. The recent conference between the landlords and the tenants, and the way in which both have blessed the new Land Bill, show how far this new spirit has gone. Now, that is a spirit with which we are ready to ally ourselves; that is a party with which we feel we can work. You may, therefore, take it for granted that the general principle which underlies Mr. Wyndham's Land Purchase Bill will be heartily supported by most of us. We reserve criticism, of course, as to details, and especially financial details; but the broad principle is one we entirely accept. And with the land question at last on its way to settlement, the Rosebery policy would be to extend and develop local self-government in Ireland as much as possible; to inquire into, and wherever possible economize on, the system of Dublin Castle rule; to encourage industrial and agricultural development freely—in short, to advance step by step along the humble line of practical utility, and not waste our time on 'heroic' measures. The end of all this, in our view, would be the creation of a prosperous and contented Ireland, of moderate Nationalist sympathies, from which a system of Home Rule might gradually arise. You must not suppose that, because we have wiped Home Rule off our slate as a policy to be embodied in a single bill and brought forward in the House of Commons, our relations with the Irish party have been severed. On the contrary, they are close and cordial. The Irish know perfectly well that we desire and work for the improvement of their country; and they are realizing, too, that ours is the only practical method by which it can be improved. And this same policy of taking things as they come, of not committing ourselves hopelessly in advance, above all, of thinking measures out before we advocate them, is our policy in English as well as

Irish affairs. In England, too, there is emerging a Centre Party that is being attracted to our banner. The younger and more enlightened Conservatives, like Mr. Winston Churchill, have more in common with Lord Rosebery than with their own leaders. You will have seen that conspicuously during the recent Army debates; and I firmly believe that the dominant party of the future will be what I may term a Centre Left party, working along Rosebery lines, absorbing the Gladstonian remnants, and recruited to some extent from the Conservative ranks. That future, no doubt, is not a near one, but we are quite content to wait for it; and we may at least claim that our policy leads to it, while the policy of the unregenerate section in the Liberal party leads nowhere. But, after all, it is not office, but principles that we are working for. We may be able to reduce the Government's majority at the next election; but, unless things change rapidly, we cannot reasonably hope to wipe it out. What we can do, however, is to prepare a state of feeling which eventually must make the existence of such an inert Government as the present impossible; and that we are doing. The new problems that are coming up, especially in the sphere of constructive social reform, are problems that we are in thorough touch and sympathy with, and better able to handle than the Conservatives. I have no doubt that, with the policy we advocate—first of all, of a sane Imperialism; secondly, of economy and efficiency; thirdly, of cautious but progressive reform—we must in the long run not only dominate all sections of the Liberal party, but also undermine the entire Conservative position. It will be up-hill work, no doubt—breaking away from the past never is easy work; but unless we accept the alternative of stagnation, it must be done."

Between these two views there is obviously a divergence so fundamental that only the conquest and absorption of one section by the other can really put an end to it. An opinion, it is true, does widely obtain that, if the Liberals were again to be returned to power, the prospect of office would act as a sufficient incentive to harmony. That is a very delicate matter, on which it is almost useless even to speculate. What is beyond argument is, that the Liberal party is weakened to the point of being paralyzed by its lack of a common policy, and by the friction between the leaders of its component sections. It is still further distracted by a movement which, as Mr. Paul hinted, may end by permeating it with socialistic ideas—I mean the Independent Labor movement. And, again, it is fatally manacled by its rupture with the Irish Nationalists. That rupture, of course, is not to be regarded as complete for all time. If ever the Liberals find themselves in office again and are prepared to "govern Ireland on Irish principles," the alliance will be renewed. But, for the present, the

Nationalists have resumed their old position of independence of both parties, and will support whichever of the two can promise or perform the most for Ireland. One of their leaders said to me, with a frankness more often encountered in American than in English politics:

"Why should we be such inconceivable fools as to keep up our alliance with the Liberals? They have neither a policy, nor a leader, nor one chance in a thousand of getting back into power again. Gratitude? Well, you can hardly expect us to believe in gratitude as a paying political virtue. We are for the party that can give Ireland something substantial in return, and the party that can do that, in nine cases out of ten, is the party that controls the House of Lords."

Here, again, is a situation which sooner or later will be paralleled in America. The time, that is, will come when the alliance between the "Solid South" and the Democratic party will be found to be no alliance at all, but merely a temporary adhesion due to accidental circumstances. No doubt, the Democrats will be just as much scandalized by the discovery as are the Liberals by the "ingratitude" of the Irish Nationalists.

On the other side of the House, among the Conservatives, the position corresponds with curious felicity to that of the Republican party in the United States. Like the Republicans, the Conservatives control both Houses by overwhelming majorities; and, like the Republicans, they have made blunder after blunder, till the country is palpably turning from them in utter exasperation. The Buller affair, the Corn Tax, the Education Bill, Mr. Brodrick's Army Scheme, the Whitaker Wright business, the Venezuelan mess have all told immensely against them. More than once the Irish votes alone have saved the Government from defeat. Oftener still, a vigorous Opposition might have done them enormous damage by leading the national resentment inspired by some of their acts. As no such Opposition exists, the country has had to take the work of chastisement into its own hands. At bye-election after bye-election, it has smitten the ministry hip and thigh, and the general position of the Government, in spite of its huge majority, is weak and even precarious. Mr. Arthur Lee, whom all Americans will remember as Captain Arthur Lee, the British Military Attaché to the United States during the Spanish war, and who is now a Conservative member of Parliament and zealous in the work of Army Reform and of improving Anglo-

American relations, gave it to me as his opinion that the weakness of the Opposition was really the measure of the Government's strength. Mr. Redmond, when he rallied the Irish Nationalist Convention to the support of the Land Bill, said pretty much the same. The Government is palpably losing ground. The greatest feathers in its cap, Mr. Chamberlain and South Africa, are items for which the country considers that full credit has already been given. South Africa no longer has any influence as an electioneering argument! The reaction that sets in after every great war is another factor—vague, perhaps, but still effective—in the process of attrition. But in the main it is on its own specific deeds that the Government is being judged and condemned; and the contrast between its performances and its opportunities is rousing, even among the rank and file, a spirit of dissatisfaction and revolt. This spirit has found a vigorous expression in the new Fourth Party, a political off-shoot that may be compared with the supporters of the "Iowa idea" among the Republicans of the United States. Sir Gilbert Parker kindly furnished me with a most interesting account of its origin and policy. Sir Gilbert, I may add, promises to repeat in politics the abundant success he has already won in literature. Some solid and useful achievements already stand to his credit; he has conquered, and in a singularly short time, that suspicion of being "unpractical" that greets the man of letters in English politics; and his unique knowledge of the ins and outs of Colonial opinion and sentiment, especially on such matters as Imperial Defence, assures him a position of real authority. This is his account of the Fourth Party movement:

"I want to make it clear, in the first place, that there is nothing in the nature of a cabal in the Group of New Tories. We are not Adullamites, 'kickers,' 'bolters,' or anything of that kind. There is nothing personal and nothing secret about our policy or motives. What I say to you here, I should be just as ready to say to my constituents, in the lobbies, or from the floor of the House itself. Of course, I know what the gossips of the moment impute against us. We are charged with party disloyalty, with personal animosity against Mr. Brodrick, with a whole catalogue of political crimes. Some genius has even discovered that our real object is to turn out the present Ministry and plant in its place a Rosebery administration to which the members of the so-called Fourth Party are to be officially attached. Now, all that is unmitigated nonsense. We are Conservatives by instinct and conviction; party duty sits no more lightly on us than on other Conservatives; and

none of us has ever had a thought of shifting his political allegiance. We claim not only to be loyal Conservatives, but to show our loyalty in a practical form by doing what we can to bring official Conservatism abreast of the times. Our movement is not a movement against, but in favor of, the party to which we belong. It is to strengthen it, to broaden it, and especially to induce it to concentrate on certain practical reforms that we are working. Broadly speaking, the task of Conservatism during the past few years has been mainly defensive. It has had to protect, and this has naturally been its chief preoccupation, the Empire from disintegration at home and abroad—in Ireland and in South Africa. What we as a Group feel is, that this defensive work has now been satisfactorily accomplished, or that, at any rate, it should not in the future absorb so much of the party energy as has been the case in the past. We feel that, thanks to the admirable, clear-sighted firmness of our leaders, there is now, as it were, a truce to the more pressing anxieties of the last decade. But a truce of this kind has its dangers. It makes men more apt to think of what has been done than of what there is still to do. It tempts them to rely rather too complacently on their successes in the past, to take it too easily for granted that no more can decently be expected of them. And when a party gets into this state of mind, it falls into a rut from which it must either be forced or else gradually lose the confidence of the country. This, roughly, is the danger that, as we see it, lies just now ahead of our party; and it is one we intend to fight against and assist in preventing. We believe that, so far from having exhausted its mandate, the real triumphs of Conservatism are still to come; but that to win them the one thing needed is a comprehensive policy of constructive reform. I would emphasize the word 'constructive.' It is the key-note of our whole position, and really embraces all that we, a small knot of comparatively young Conservatives, some of whom are new to politics but not to political questions, and who believe ourselves to have a considerable knowledge of and sympathy with contemporary needs and tendencies, are striving to attain. We think, in short, that for the Conservative party to trust for another ten years solely to the watchwords of Empire and Union, will be politically fatal; that there is an emphatic demand for something more tangible, more vital, more definitely practical. This, I think, you may take to be the general animating principle behind this Group of men. Our aim is to give to the Conservative party a new impulse towards efficiency and practicality. Each of us, of course, has some special subject or hobby. Some of us have made a particular study of questions like the Housing of the Working Classes, Poor Law Administration, the control and regulation of locomotion, the development of Municipal Institutions, Municipal Trading, Imperial Relations. Others are more interested in those matters of fiscal reform, of commercial and industrial regulation, which in England have never won the important place they deserve and must ultimately reach. Others, again, regard the reform of our administrative machinery—which has fallen far below the American and German standards—as one of the most pressing problems of the

day. At all events, here were a number of active earnest Conservatives, each contributing his quota to a broad policy of progress and reform. It was inevitable under the conditions of Parliamentary life that we should at some time come together, and agree more or less to act in common. But what actually gave us a rallying-point, and so formed the nucleus of the Group of New Tories, was Mr. Brodrick's Army Scheme. Here we all met on common ground. Whatever our 'second string,' the Army question was with most of us the first; and we soon found ourselves practically at one in condemning Mr. Brodrick's scheme as extravagant, inefficient, and, in our opinion, and I think it may now be said in the opinion of a majority in the country, unsuited to the national needs. Two results followed from this. One was that a certain amount of concerted action was forced upon us by Parliamentary requirements. A single member, acting by himself, has little power in the House of Commons. To make any impression at all, you must, so far as possible, organize. We therefore found ourselves drawn more and more closely together on the basis of a common opposition to Mr. Brodrick's Six Army Corps, and from this constant association and intercourse there followed the knowledge that we thought in common not only on the Army question, but on the many other points of social, fiscal, economic, and administrative reform I have mentioned. Hence the Group of New Tories. You will see from this that it is not a very sinister development, after all, but something that, given the circumstances, was not only natural and inevitable, but also much needed. We may, at any rate, fairly claim to have justified our existence during the Army debates, and I rather anticipate that the future will not be without its opportunities, too."

Unquestionably, the greatest domestic achievement of the Government is the Irish Land Purchase Bill. It really promises to settle that heart-breaking question for good and all; but in one way at any rate it only makes the future yet more hazardous to forecast. Sir Robert Peel never expected to be the statesman to repeal the Corn Laws; Disraeli never expected to be the author of Household Suffrage; this Government does not expect to introduce a Home Rule Bill. It is one of the most curious developments of English politics that Home Rule should to-day be spoken of as one of the possibilities of the not distant future. There is a hint in this of the probable issue of the present complex and contradictory situation. The country grows more and more dissatisfied with the Government, and it is still without confidence in the Opposition. The broad result, as it seems to me, will be to make the Irish once more the masters of English politics.

SYDNEY BROOKS.